Eriko Ogihara-Schuck, *Miyazaki's Animism Abroad: The Reception of Japanese Religious Themes by American and German Audiences*

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IN THE LAST FEW DECADES, Japanese animation (anime) has become an established research topic in fields such as Media Studies, Cultural Studies, and Japanese Studies. Thanks to the critical and commercial success of animated works like *Akira* (OTOMO 1988), *Ghost in the Shell* (OSHII 1995), or the films by Studio Ghibli, as well as the digital distribution of fan-subbed anime TV series, international audiences have become familiar with the aesthetics, narratives, and themes of Japanese animation. In response to this increasing global expansion of anime, scholars from different countries and disciplines have started to reflect on Japanese animation. Interestingly, the connections and influences between religion, Japanese culture, and anime have become a productive area of research. Jolyon THOMAS has argued that the "religious aspects of manga and anime culture are visible in the ways in which people visualize religious worlds, entertain religious ideas, and appropriate religious sites and concepts for novel purposes" (2012, 155). According to BULJAN and CUSACK, "the mosaic of the anime world is built up largely from elements of specifically Japanese spiritual and religious traditions" (2015, 209) in such a way that viewing anime can be an educational experience for Western audiences who are unfamiliar with Japanese religiosity. OKUYAMA's work is also relevant in this area, although her scope is wider as she discusses the presence of Japanese mythology, understood as "a collection of sacred texts with spiritual (or religious) significance to the Japanese people" (2015, 211), in popular films and anime. These works offer historical and cultural approaches to audiovisual products with religious themes, drawing examples from different media and analyzing creations by a variety of authors. They provide concepts and explanations for Western audiences to interpret and better understand Japanese religiosity, but academic studies on specific reception processes of Japanese works with religious motifs are still scarce.[1]

Miyazaki's Animism Abroad, by Eriko Ogihara-Schuck, also deals with the representation of Japanese religion in anime and its possibilities to convey autochthonous Japanese beliefs such as animism to foreign audiences. Unlike the previously mentioned works, it focuses on the films by one single creator, Hayao Miyazaki, and it attempts to establish in which ways animist motifs present in Miyazaki's

1. Ogihara-Schuck explains (page 26) that her work departs from two previous reception studies: an article by THOMAS (2007) and a dissertation by Junko Toriya.

films have been translated and interpreted in countries such as the U. S. and Germany. Essentially, Ogihara-Schuck argues that anime "can generate international dialogue in the arena of religion. And, significantly, the religion that promotes such dialogue is not just present in the films' content, but manifests itself within the form" (10). In order to demonstrate this, she uses two strategies: on the one hand, American and German textual translations of Miyazaki's films as well as certain paratextual elements (trailers, posters, and credit songs) are analyzed with the purpose of detecting modifications from the Japanese original version; on the other, the author discusses film reviews from both countries as an attempt to establish if the reviewers' cinematic experiences depend on the different adaptation strategies (domestication or foreignization) employed by the distributors of Miyazaki's works. Thus, Ogihara-Schuck addresses the transnational reception of Japanese animation through a methodology that combines discourse and translation analyses with basic visual analyses of certain elements such as posters or film sequences.

This book emerged out of Ogihara-Schuck's PhD dissertation, and some parts previously appeared as chapters in two books (HOFF KRAEMER and LEWIS eds. 2010; CORTIEL 2011). It is composed of four main sections and a brief conclusion. The introduction, "Animism, Religion and Medium as Contested Terms" (3–31), begins with an overview of the terms "animism" and "anime." Ogihara-Schuck considers animism as religion and argues that both animism and the medium of anime are characterized by their openness, which can be seen in five common aspects: inclusiveness, multiplicity of characters, metamorphosis, distortion of time and space, and flexibility. After discussing briefly the notion of techno-animism, she explains her methodology. Chapter 1 is entitled "Animism Challenges Monotheism: Disasters and Japanese Reception of Hayao Miyazaki's Films" (33–58). It introduces Miyazaki's views on animism and explores in which ways the animist motifs of his films have been understood or discussed within Japanese society. Ogihara-Schuck argues that Miyazaki was influenced by Japanese spiritual intellectuals such as Takeshi Umehara Takeshi and Yamaori Tetsuo.[2] The author also develops an interesting analysis of the discourse on animism and Miyazaki's works in relation to traumatic historical events, such as the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and the Great East Japan earthquake of 11 March 2011.

Chapter 2, "Does Monotheism Challenge Animism? Transitions of American and German Adapters' Approaches" (59–138), focuses on the verbal and visual changes introduced in five films directed by Miyazaki during the distribution process in the

2. Based on the ideas of scholar Shimazono Susumu, Ogihara-Schuck defines spiritual intellectuals as "scholars of philosophy, religion, and psychology who have extensively appeared in mass media to discuss indigenous Japanese religious traditions as the core of Japanese cultural identity" (38).

U.S. and Germany.[3] Ogihara-Schuck compares the Japanese versions with the international editions in order to establish the representation of animism in Christian countries and cultures. She develops interesting reflections about how the notion of kami can be translated (like "god" or "spirit" in English) and how it conveys, along with the narrative and visual elements, a certain image of animism. She ultimately suggests that American versions of Miyazaki's films tend to domesticate animism while German adaptations opt to present its foreign origin.[4] In the third chapter, "Animism and Visuals: Religious and Nonreligious Reviewers' Responses" (139–90), the author analyses American and German reviews of Miyazaki's works, aiming to detect what effect the adaptation of the animist topics had on viewers. Interestingly, she covers reviews published in standard newspapers as well as evaluations published in Christian media, such as magazines or online sites. While nonreligious reviews tend to relate animism to certain concepts such as magic, strangeness, or moral ambiguity, Ogihara-Schuck detects that certain Christian reviews used Miyazaki's films to condemn animism while others present a more inclusive approach and see the films as opportunities to glimpse other forms of religiosity. The conclusion (191–95) summarizes the main results and the author highlights the openness of anime, since "American and German receptions of Miyazaki's films illuminated the texts' visual and verbal ability to engage American and German audiences with new cultures and in particular with unfamiliar religious arenas" (192–93).

Miyazaki's Animism Abroad is an interesting book that addresses the authorial dimension in the study of anime and religion, emphasizing the capacity of audiovisual media to function as channels for cultural exchange and awareness of foreign religions. Ogihara-Schuck's characterization of the discourse on animism in contemporary Japan provides a rich background to understand Miyazaki's oeuvre, offering a detailed cultural contextualization usually ignored or not properly covered in many of the books discussing his works. Similarly, by analyzing film reviews published in media targeted at Christian audiences, she points out a promising line of research that could be very fertile in both film and religion studies. However, it is also possible to question certain aspects of *Miyazaki's Animism Abroad* such as the essentialization of Christian thought or the simplistic approach to film reception. In her attempt to compare animism and monotheism, Ogihara-Schuck ends up claiming that some of the modifications in the foreign editions of Miyazaki's films are due to a particular world view rooted in Christian values but without providing a convincing argument to support her claims. And, considering the numerous theories that have been proposed in the field of film studies about spectatorship and film

3. These movies are *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984), *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), *Princess Mononoke* (1997), *Spirited Away* (2001), and *Ponyo* (2008).
4. Ogihara-Schuck argues that "inserting religious terms that cannot be fully translated into German, the German adaptations conduct constructive foreignization, possibly with the purpose of motivating the German audience to learn about the foreign belief system" (138).

reception in the last few decades, Ogihara-Schuck's focus on textual modifications and critical evaluations can only cover a limited area of the reception of Japanese animism by foreign audiences.

In *Miyazaki's Animism Abroad*, Ogihara-Schuck offers a detailed, thorough, and well-structured study of the discursive construction of animism on three different levels: textual, visual, and cultural. She provides an insightful background to understand Miyazaki's films as well as suggestive ideas about the role of animation, and more generally the media, in the dissemination of local religious beliefs in a global world. For these reasons, this work deserves the attention of scholars interested in the intersections of anime and religion, the transnational expansion of Japanese animation, the figure of Miyazaki, animism and the media, and cross-cultural perceptions of religion.

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